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September 17, 2019

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

RE: Support for establishing Rural Digital Opportunity Fund

Dear Commissioners:

On behalf of the Worcester County Commissioners, I would like to express our strong support for the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) proposed establishment of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, which would direct critically-needed funding to rural communities to extend broadband to unserved areas.

Worcester County is an underserved community on the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland. Roughly 50% of residents have no access to broadband. Making affordable high-speed broadband accessible to all county residents is among the critical success factors identified by the Worcester County Commissioners earlier this year. Thus, in June 2019 the Commissioners launched a study to identify options to overcome geographical limitations and close the digital divide to achieve this goal. Funding from the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund will be vital as we work to develop and implement this plan.

High-speed internet is critical to meeting our goals to continue providing access to exceptional schools, quality healthcare, cultural opportunities, safe and sufficient transportation, sustainable county services, economic growth, and safe and livable communities. Worcester County's close proximity to NASA Wallops Flight Facility, operated by Goddard Space Flight Center, for rocket launch support for science and exploration missions creates unique opportunities to attract advanced technology manufacturing companies that work directly with and/or support NASA. Worcester County's industrial park is a technology hub with large parcels ready for commercial development that would hold the supporting aerospace and engineering companies, but many of those companies work with advanced technologies and rely on connectivity and internet availability.

An attractive tax structure, abundant workforce, and transportation network of highways, rail, and airports in close proximity to major metropolitan markets, makes Worcester County, Maryland attractive to new and expanding businesses. However, the lack of broadband severely

restricts our ability to attract and retain advanced technology companies that rely on the high-speed internet necessary to adapt to our changing technological world, entice our school students to learn here, live here, and stay here to pursue careers after completing their education, and meet the needs of rural businesses and residents.

Sincerely,



Diana Purnell
President

CC: U.S. Senator Ben Cardin

U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen

U.S. Congressman Andy Harris

Information Technology Director Brian Jones

Economic Development Director Kathryn Gordon